

IS GUIDING FOR YOU?

A self-evaluation for potential Licensed Battlefield Guide candidates

While a deep factual knowledge of the Civil War and the Battle of Gettysburg is essential for success as an LBG candidate, other factors are equally important. Before investing great time and effort in preparing for the written examination, please consider the following attributes of successful licensed battlefield guides.

Do you love to teach? Organizing information and presenting it to those who wish to learn is a rewarding skill, and essential to effective guiding. Perhaps you've never served in a formal role as a teacher, but have you taught Scouts how to tie knots, or your kids how to play softball, or introduced a friend to your favorite hobby by walking them through the first steps? If you love imparting knowledge and helping people understand the events surrounding the Battle of Gettysburg, you will love guiding.

Are you a storyteller? Shelby Foote once said he hoped to be remembered as a storyteller rather than a historian. The Battle of Gettysburg is one enormous story, composed of many smaller stories of real people and dramatic events. Tours that seamlessly blend the details of battle with stories of the people of Gettysburg can be the most powerful and memorable for our visitors. Do you have a knack for weaving stories together for family, friends, or others? Can you tell stories on any subject you enjoy, and make them interesting?

Are you an extemporaneous speaker? Many of the best battlefield tours are tailored to the interests of our visitors and often times completely unscripted and presented without reference to notes. Your narrative may change and adjust frequently based on visitor questions or responses. The "canned" narrative must be avoided at all costs- it will bore you and bore your visitors.

Are you a simplifier? A successful guide must constantly distill a complex battle story into elements that our visitors can absorb in two hours. Are you able to keep the big picture in mind without getting lost in the details?

Do you love people? The study of Civil War history can be a very solitary pursuit. In contrast, guiding is highly people-oriented. You will spend your time guiding in constant close contact with people of every stripe. Some will be vastly different than you in background, social status, education, or personality. Most often you will be closely confined with them in their vehicle. In a sense, it is like sitting in their home as a guest. Do you love people enough to devote yourself to them, and are happy doing so?

Are you comfortable speaking to groups? Public speaking is known to be one of the most dreaded life experiences for many people. Are you at ease presenting in front of groups ranging from one to fifty or more?

Are you flexible? The tour belongs to the visitor paying the fee, and the guide's intentions for the tour are secondary. The visitor's home state, soldier ancestor, or unique interests may demand that you change your tour plans frequently.

Are you patient? Inquisitive visitors may frequently interrupt your presentation with questions and comments. Will interruptions frustrate you, or simply give you clues on how to better personalize a tour for these individuals?

Are you humble? For many visitors their visit to Gettysburg National Military Park may be the first time they have been to a National Park. If they have viewed the Cyclorama, Film and Museum it could be their only experience with the American Civil War and their questions may reflect this. Are you willing and able to adjust your tours to meet the visitors' knowledge base with grace and humility?